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As the Twig is Bent"

A Rural School Drama

By
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Social Service Bureau

1361 Cleveland Ave. No.

St. Paul, Minn.



“As the Twig Is Bent”

A Rural School Drama

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

MISS BEST, a rural school teacher.

KATE, } her pupils.
NINA, }

LAWRENCE SPRAGUE, the big boy, called “Larry.”

GERALD, who lisps.

MRS. WILLIAMS, the teacher’s friend.

MR. SHARP, } members of the School Board.
MR. PETERSON, }

MRS. LONG, who boards the teacher.

MRS. SHARP, who helps “run the school.”

MRS. BUTLER, who was “well brought up.”

BIDDY, the Irish “help.”

WEARY WILLIE, a tramp.

ACT I.

A one room school.

ACT II.

Sitting room at Mrs. Long’s.

ACT III.

The new teacherage.

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“As the Twig Is Bent”

ACT I.

Scene, a one room school room. Doors right and left, window center. Blackboard with the quotation “As the twig is bent the tree inclines,” is on wall at left center. Table with industrial work and Babcock testing machine up stage at right. Pupils’ seats at right center, teacher’s desk and bookcase left center. Books and papers litter the desk. A vase of withered flowers is also on the table. A bench with a pail of water is near the door on the right.

Miss Best, the teacher, is working at her desk, Kate and Nina are cleaning the board, Larry is sprawled at his desk at the back of room.

TR. That is enough, girls. The boards look very well.

KATE. Can I clean your desk, Miss Best?

TR. Yes, you may put it in order if you wish (*rising*). Be careful and do not disturb any of these papers.

NINA. What can I do?

TR. You *can* do a lot of things (*smiling at her*). You may put these books in the bookcase.

NINA (*taking books*). I always forget about can and may.

TR. Don’t you think there are some mothers who would like to have their little helpers at home?

NINA. Na, my mother don’t need me. If she does I’d lots rather help you.

KATE. So would I, teacher. Besides, we want to wait for you.

TR. Not tonight, girls. I am going to stay a long, long time. I must put some arithmetic problems on this board that you have made so nice and clean. Then I am going to sweep the floor and dust and do a lot of things. (*Begins writing problems on board.*)

KATE. Let us sweep the floor; we’d like to just fine.

NINA. I know how. Mother makes me sweep the kitchen floor.

TR. No, you have helped me quite enough. Now you must put on your things and go home.

KATE. May I take this book home to read? I’ll be awful careful of it?

TR. You did not forget that time. Yes, Kate, you may take it home and let me see—, Nina may take these number cards.

NINA (*taking cards*). Thank you.

TR. Tomorrow, Kate, I want you to tell us one of the stories you have read, and, Nina, I will see how many of these numbers you can add correctly. Now run along.

KATE. You know, teacher, I like to go to school awfully well. Last year my mother could hardly get me to go; but this year she can't keep me to home.

TR. Would you mind calling me Miss Best, instead of teacher? (*Smiling.*) I am sure that you would rather have your friends call you Kate than little girl.

KATE. I just hate to be called that.

TR. What do you like about school, Kate?

KATE. I like the stories you tell us, and our sewing lessons, and the games we play and—

NINA (*interrupting*). I like the canning club best (*looking at a can of fruit*). Next year I want to be president.

TR. (*putting her arms around them and taking them to the door*). I am glad that we can have such good times together, but you must go. I have work to do, and I know that your mothers will be looking for you. Good-night.

(*Exeunt Kate and Nina, R.*)

LARRY (*laughing*). They are harder to get rid of than a wind-mill agent. Why don't you throw them out?

TR. What is keeping you so long?

LARRY. I can't get this example.

TR. Why? (*going to him*). Don't you understand it?

LARRY (*rising*). I thought I did, but somehow it won't come out right.

TR. Let me look at it. Here is your difficulty. You did not subtract the cost of the feed before you worked out the per cent of profit the farmer made on his hogs.

LARRY. I knew there must be some mistake, for a farmer could never make that big profit. Now I'll get it done in a jiffy.

(*Enter Kate and Nina, R.*)

KATE. Oh, Miss Best, there is an awfully pretty bird out on that old dead tree, and we don't know what kind it is.

TR. (*going to window*). Where is it?

KATE (*pointing*). There. Don't you see it on that dead limb?

TR. Don't you know that bird? It is a woodpecker. It is trying to get some worms out of that old tree. Here is a picture of it. (*Shows picture.*) This bulletin tells all about it.

NINA. Look, Kate, there is the same spot on its head.

KATE. Tell us about it, Miss Best.

TR. I will in the morning. We will have that for our nature study lesson.

KATE. Oh, goody!

TR. Phoebe Cary has written a very pretty story in verse telling about the red-headed woodpecker. I will read that to you too, tomorrow.

NINA. I wish it was tomorrow now.

KATE. I liked our tree lesson that we had this morning, you know, about the straight tree and the crooked one.

NINA. Poor little crooked tree! He didn't have a fair show, did he?

TR. Do you remember the quotation?

KATE AND NINA (*together*). "As the twig is bent the tree inclines."

TR. (*picking up a vase of withered flowers*). Now you must hurry home. Your mothers will think that I have kept you after school.

(*Exit Miss Best, L.*)

KATE. You didn't know that quotation; I saw you look at the board.

NINA. You didn't either.

KATE. I did to. I saw you look sideways at the board. (*Rubbing out quotation*) Now see if you can say it.

NINA. "As the twig is bent the tree inclines." Smarty! I wish teacher had let me have a story book instead of these old number cards. I hate them.

KATE. Miss Best don't want to be called teacher. I know why she let me have the book.

NINA. Why?

KATE. Cause.

NINA. Cause why?

KATE. I won't tell.

NINA. Please.

KATE (*shaking head*). Hum um.

NINA. I'll do something awfully nice if you'll tell me.

KATE. What?

NINA. I'll let you wear my garnet ring.

KATE. The one you got for your birthday?

NINA. Yep. (*Giving her ring.*)

KATE. Well, it's because teacher likes me better than she does you.

NINA. She don't either.

KATE. She does to.

NINA. How do you know?

KATE. Ma says I'm teacher's pet, and I guess she knows.

NINA. Your ma don't know nothing.

KATE. She does to.

NINA. She don't know half as much as my mother. Mrs. Sharp said your mother told all she knew.

KATE. Mrs. Sharp never said such a thing.

NINA. She did to. She was talking to ma in the kitchen one night when I was washing dishes, and I heard her, I did.

LARRY. Here you kids, stop your noise; I can't hear myself think.

NINA (*making a face at Larry*). Shut up! She said to ma, she said, "that Mrs. Long tells everything she knows."

KATE. Mrs. Sharp is a horrid, mean old thing, and so are you too.

NINA. I'm not.

KATE. You are just as horrid as you can be, and I hate you.

NINA. I'm not horrid (*slapping her*). You take that for being so mean. (*They begin to fight.*)

LARRY (*jumping up and separating them*). Here you little fighting cocks, behave yourselves. What would Miss Best say if she knew that you were fighting over such a silly thing?

NINA. I'm not a fighting cock, smarty.

LARRY. You'll be an old hen if you keep on the way you have started.

(*Nina makes faces at Larry, Kate drops in seat and begins crying.*)

(*Enter Miss Best, L. carrying broom.*)

TR. What is the matter? Kate, what are you crying about?

KATE (*sobbing*). Nina slapped me.

TR. Nina, did you slap Kate?

NINA (*sullenly*). Yes, I did.

TR. Why, Nina Britton, I'm ashamed of you!

LARRY. Kate got what was coming to her, Miss Best. They were both pretty much to blame.

TR. Then I'm ashamed of both of you. I have always thought that you were the best of friends. What shall I do with you?

LARRY. You might take away the book and number cards, that's where the row started.

NINA (*making a face*). Tattle-tale.

TR. I see. No, I won't take them away, but I will tell you why I gave Kate a book and Nina the cards. You know, girls, it is hard for some persons to learn to read and easy to learn numbers. Sometimes it is just the other way. Now, Kate can get her numbers easily but needs help in reading. On the other hand, Nina can read more easily than she can do numbers. She must put her time on those. Do you see?

NINA (*going to teacher and putting her arms around her*). Then you don't like her better than you do me?

TR. Of course not; but I won't like either of you if you quarrel. The best thing for you little chums to do is to help each other. Nina can help Kate with her reading, and Kate can drill Nina on her numbers.

KATE. Do you mean play teacher?

TR. That is just what I mean. Nina can be teacher first and hear your reading lesson, then you will be teacher and give her a number lesson drill. Now run along.

(Enter Bidly, R.)

BIDDY. The missus was after sending me for Katie. She said if ye was kapin' her after school ye was to let her come home. She wants to fit a dress onto her.

TR. No, I'm not keeping her. See how much trouble you have made by not going home when you should.

BIDDY. Sure it's no trouble at all, at all. I was glad to get a little step outside the kitchen. You'll be coming home yourself soon?

TR. Yes, Bidly, but don't wait for me.

BIDDY. Sure, it's workin' long hours ye are, I'm thinkin'. Well, so long.

(Exeunt Bidly, Kate and Nina, R.)

LARRY (laughing). They are worse to get rid of than a windmill agent working a tornado insurance combination.

TR. Did you get your problems? (She examines problems.)

LARRY. I guess they are all right now. I like to do these problems that show us how to work out the profits on the farm. There is something to them. When I was in school before I had to spend all of my time on examples like cube root and longitude and time, and—

TR. (interrupting). I believe that our time is too valuable to spend it working out problems that we will never by any chance use in after life (laughing). I find that subtraction is the process that I use for the most part.

LARRY. If I study hard and stay and work nights, do you think I can pass the eighth grade examinations?

TR. I think so. Why?

LARRY. I've been reading a bulletin of the School of Agriculture and I've about made up my mind that I would like to go there.

TR. (getting the broom and beginning to sweep). I wish that you could. The school offers a splendid course for those who intend to be farmers.

LARRY (taking the broom away from her). Here, let me sweep while you put your lessons on the board for tomorrow.

TR. Do you know how?

LARRY. Maybe not as well as you do; but if I don't get the floor clean you can make me do it over again.

(Tr. goes to board and puts number lesson on.) Gee! I wish I knew as much as you do (watches her for a minute). I'll bet that I am as old as you are, or older.

TR. Why aren't you farther along in school? You should be in high school or college.

LARRY. Well, you see, Miss Best, it was just this way. I always hated school, and the folks couldn't make me go. I made up my mind that as soon as I was twenty-one I would go to the city and get a job. I talked it over with a feller I know, and he told me that I'd have a better show if I had some more schooling. That is how I happened to come this fall.

(Enter Gerald R., looks through desk.)

LARRY. Say, kid, didn't you go home?

GERALD. Yeth, b-but I came back again.

LARRY. What for?

GERALD. I f-f-forgot thomthin'.

LARRY. What is it?

GERALD (looking under seat). I shan't tell.

LARRY. Why?

GERALD. Oh, c-cause.

LARRY. Cause what.

GERALD (looking under desk). Cause I don't have to.

LARRY. You're a pretty smart kid.

Tr. What are you looking for?

GERALD. Thomthin' I for-for-forgot.

Tr. (going to Gerald). What is it? Perhaps I can help you find it. They say that women can find things more easily than men. (Pause.) Is it your pencil?

GERALD (looking through desk). No m-m-ma'am.

Tr. Is it a book you want to use tonight?

GERALD. No, m-m-ma'am.

Tr. Or your writing tablet?

GERALD (looking under desk). No, m-m-ma'am.

LARRY. Maybe he is looking for his rubbers.

Tr. Have you looked out in the cloak room?

GERALD. No, m-m-ma'am.

Tr. Perhaps it is there.

GERALD. No ma'am, I've found it (holding up gum). It wath my gum. I s-s-stuck it under my desk; then I f-forgot it.

(Exit Gerald, R.)

(Tr. breaks into fits of laughter.)

LARRY (looking at her in surprise). What in thunder are you laughing at?

Tr. (between spasms of laughter.) It's so funny.

LARRY (looking at her in surprise). What's funny? That kid?

Tr. Everything, Larry, everything.

LARRY (looking out of window). Here comes someone, an old lady. (Takes up broom and begins sweeping.)

Tr. (going to door). I must be good now.

(Enter Mrs. Williams, R.)

Tr. Oh, Aunty Williams, I am surprised and delighted to see you!

MRS. WILLIAMS (kissing her). How do you do, Helen? I had to go over to Riverside to get some jelly glasses; I am finishing up my grape jelly; and I thought I would drive around this way and see you. I want to have a talk with you.

Tr. I am ever so glad you came. (Showing fruit.) See

what my girls have been doing. We have organized a canning club.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Did the children do that?

Tr. Yes. Isn't it lovely!

MRS. WILLIAMS. Yes, it looks good. But you haven't been over to see us for a long time.

Tr. Have this chair, Auntie. I have wanted to come, but my lesson plans and the papers I must correct keep me pretty busy outside of school hours.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Surely, Helen, you don't do those on Sunday?

Tr. I am helping in the Sunday School, too.

MRS. WILLIAMS. I mustn't stay long as it is getting late (*sitting*). I came to see you about something in particular.

Tr. (*sitting at desk*). Yes.

MRS. WILLIAMS. You know your mother was my best friend. When your father died and left her to bring you up, and educate you, I always felt as if she were having a pretty hard time of it.

Tr. (*with feeling*). Poor mother worked very hard for me; I didn't realize at the time how hard.

MRS. WILLIAMS. When she died, just after you graduated, I said to Sam, "We must do all we can for Hetty's little girl."

Tr. That was very kind of you, Auntie Williams.

MRS. WILLIAMS. It was only natural. That was why when this district needed a new teacher I persuaded Sam to see the board and apply for the place for you. Sam has a good deal of influence here even if we don't live in this district.

Tr. I know he has.

MRS. WILLIAMS. So you see Sam and me feel as if we were responsible for you.

Tr. I never would have been here if you hadn't found the position for me. I needed the work badly, too.

MRS. WILLIAMS. And you are going to keep on needing it, ain't you?

Tr. Yes, I must work. I haven't any money.

MRS. WILLIAMS. It would be a mighty bad thing for you if you lost this position, wouldn't it? You could hardly get another without a recommend.

Tr. (*rising in alarm*). Lost this position! What do you mean?

MRS. WILLIAMS. Don't get scared. Your Auntie Williams don't intend to let you lose it. That is why I came around to see you when I ought to be tending to my grapes. Sit down.

Tr. (*sitting*). What is the trouble?

MRS. WILLIAMS. Just this. A good deal of talk has been going the rounds about the things you have been teaching the children.

Tr. (*laughing*). Don't worry about that. The teacher always expects to be the center of all the community gossip.

MRS. WILLIAMS. But, this is more than gossip. I suppose

you got some high flutin' notions in that school you graduated from. Take my advice and forget them. They ain't needed in a country school.

TR. Tell me. What am I teaching that is being criticised.

MRS. WILLIAMS. One thing is that you are wasting the children's time teaching things in school that they might better learn at home of their mothers. Things like cooking and sewing.

TR. Yes, and what else?

MRS. WILLIAMS. That the boys are fooling around whittling things out of wood when they ought to be studying. You know, Helen, farmer's children don't have much time to go to school, and they have to make the best use of the time they do get. They ain't like city folks, running to school all of their lives.

TR. I know that perfectly well. That is why I am teaching the things I do. I am trying to train my boys and girls to live in a better way on the farm.

MRS. WILLIAMS. That is you idea, is it?

TR. I want them to understand and love farm life. That is why I am teaching domestic science and manual training. I have also taken up seed and milk testing. If we want our boys to stay on the farm, then we must make farm work interesting. I am trying to do constructive teaching.

MRS. WILLIAMS. So that's it. It is worse than I supposed. Helen, your father was a good man, but he was mighty set in his ways. I hope you don't take after him.

TR. (*laughing*). Then you would have me like the man who said that he could teach that the earth was round or flat to suit the district?

MRS. WILLIAMS. Helen, I want you to be a sensible girl like your mother was. (*Rising.*) I must go now. Remember what it will mean to you, to all of us, if this "constructive teaching," as you call it, loses you your job.

TR. Why, Auntie Williams, the whole thing is absurd. They can't take my school away from me for teaching the things that should be taught in rural schools.

MRS. WILLIAMS. The farmers aren't as big fools as some people think they are. They pay big taxes to support the schools. They know what they want. When they send their children to school they want them to learn the same things that they would learn if they went to town to school; reading, arithmetic, grammar, and spelling.

TR. I teach all of those subjects.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Maybe you do. I won't say that you don't try. But I was just looking at that stuff you have on the blackboard. What do you call that?

TR. That is the fourth grade arithmetic lesson.

MRS. WILLIAMS. That is just what I am talking about, and every one else in the district. I used to teach school before I was married and I know an arithmetic lesson when I see it.

That lesson is all about corn and potatoes and hogs and milk. The children get all that to home. When they go to school they want something different. I know all about it.

TR. Can't you see that I am giving them the same processes in terms that they understand and must use on the farm?

MRS. WILLIAMS. I see that you are making yourself the laughing stock of the town, and Sam and I have to stand the brunt of it because we brought you here. (*Wipes her eyes.*)

TR. (*putting her arms around her*). Aunt, I am very sorry that I have made trouble for you. I'll try my best to do better. Indeed I will.

MRS. WILLIAMS (*wiping her eyes*). Now you are just like your mother. Tell me, do you still have to sleep with that Irish woman?

TR. Biddy isn't so bad. She is very kind to me. Perhaps I will be glad to have her for a bed fellow when the weather gets cold. There is no way of heating the room. I just wish that I could persuade the district to build a teacher's cottage like they have in some states, but I would only get into worse disfavor.

MRS. WILLIAMS. You can tell me.

TR. (*picking up a paper and showing it to her*). Here is the picture of one. The teacher lives right next the school house. She is independent instead of having to live in a home where she is not wanted.

MRS. WILLIAMS. That would be good for the teacher, and the district, too. It is always hard to get anyone to board her in our district.

TR. Then the teacher has a chance to teach the girls practical housekeeping—

MRS. WILLIAMS (*interrupting*). As I told you before, they don't want to learn that in school. They have that to home.

TR. From what I have seen in some homes I should say that they needed it badly. They aren't all as good housekeepers as you are.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Tut, tut! There you go again. The farmers have plenty to eat and wear and that is all they need. I'm going home before I quarrel with you. You are so headstrong—

TR. (*laughing*). Just like my father. I won't say anything more about the teacher's cottage and I will come over next Sunday, and please have some of your Parker House rolls, Aunt Williams. You must teach me how to make them.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Shaw! A teacher doesn't have to cook.

TR. I might want to teach someone else, you know (*laughing*), but not in this district. Good-bye.

MRS. WILLIAMS. I don't know what to make of you, Helen, but I'll expect you Sunday. Good-bye.

(*Exit Mrs. Williams, L.*)

(*Tr. comes back to her desk and sits down in a thoughtful attitude.*)

LARRY (*coming forward*). Is the floor clean enough, Miss Best? If it isn't I'll do it over again.

TR. Why, Larry, are you still here? Why didn't you go home?

LARRY. I bargained to sweep the floor for you.

TR. That was done ages ago.

LARRY. Well, teacher, excuse me I mean, Miss Best, it was just this way, I couldn't help but hear what that old woman was saying to you.

TR. You mustn't speak that way of Mrs. Williams; she is my best friend.

LARRY. Oh, she means all right. But I was just hanging around; I wanted a chance to tell her a few things that she don't know. I've gone to this school ever since I was a little shaver and I've hated it worse than poison. Me and the other kids skipped school every chance we got. Why? Just because the teachers were giving us the kind of dope that she wants to make you give us. Don't you do it, teacher. Your kind is the kind that helps. You have shown us that farming is a business just the same as any other, and the farmer to be successful must use his brain. You have made our work mean a lot. Why, the kids wouldn't miss a day if you paid them for it. What does a lot of gossiping old women know about it, anyhow?

TR. Why, Larry, you are quite an orator.

LARRY. You've made me what I am. Now it is up to you to finish the job. (*Looking out of window.*) This must be your visiting day. Here comes another visitor.

TR. Do you know who it is?

LARRY. Peter Oscar Peterson, honored member of the school board.

(*Enter Mr. Peterson, R.*)

TR. How do you do, Mr. Peterson?

MR. PETERSON. Perty gude, tank you (*shaking hands*). How's yourself?

TR. Very well. Won't you have this chair?

MR. PETERSON. Na, ay vas yust going past and ay saw the school door open so ay yust valked in har.

TR. We are always glad to have the parents of our pupils visit us.

MR. PETERSON. My son, Yohn, how is he making it?

TR. John is very much interest in his work, and is doing well.

MR. PETERSON. So! Ay don't speak English gude, ay yust look around, ya.

TR. That is right. (*Showing the industrial work.*) Here are some things the boys are making. This weaving is done by the little folks.

MR. PETERSON. Ya.

TR. The girls are making these aprons. This is our Babcock testing machine.

MR. PETERSON. Ya, ay know ham.

TR. We have organized a district testing association. Your John was elected president.

MR. PETERSON. How much dis tast machine cost?

TR. We bought it, and these seed cases, from the money we made from a harvest festival. I don't remember just what we gave; do you, Larry?

LARRY. Yes, we gave \$9.75 for them.

TR. The agricultural instructor from one of the high schools came out and gave a talk to the boys on testing. He showed them that some of their cows were not paying for their keep.

MR. PETERSON. So?

TR. The boys got so interested that they started a testing association of their own.

MR. PETERSON (*to Larry*). Ay tank you stay to school pretty late, ya.

LARRY. I'm looking for a job. You are on the school board. I want to hire out as janitor.

MR. PETERSON. Yanitor, vat's dat?

LARRY. The one who sweeps the floor, and builds the fires, and brings in wood, and—

MR. PETERSON. De school ma'am, he do dat, ya.

LARRY. Nothing doing, then?

TR. (*showing seed cases*). I am having the children make collections of weed seeds.

MR. PETERSON. Ay vont my Yohn to learn Anglish. Ay vont ham to learn to read and spell. Ay didn't have no shance ven ay vas young. Ay vont my Yohn to have a shance, ya.

(*Larry looks slyly at Miss Best smiling.*)

TR. Larry, did you tell me something about a windmill agent awhile ago?

LARRY. I'm going. Good-night, Miss Best.

(*Exit Larry, R.*)

TR. (*bravely*). We will try to give John the best chance we can, Mr. Peterson.

MR. PETERSON. So? Vell, ay tank ay skall go now, too.

TR. Come and visit us sometime when the children are here. I should like to have you see them at work.

MR. PETERSON. Ya, tank you, ay vill. (*Shaking hands.*) Good-bye.

TR. Good-bye, Mr. Peterson. I'm glad that you came in.

(*Exit Mr. Peterson, R.*)

TR. (*going to desk and sitting down with a sigh*). What next? (*Laughs, picks up a paper, looks at it, drops it, drops head on desk.*)

(Enter Tramp.)

(The tramp's face first appears in the window, then he enters, slightly intoxicated. He staggers up to the waterpail, looks around for a dipper then drinks from the side of pail. He next discovers the figure at the desk, and his face lights up. He swaggers up to the table.)

TRAMP. A hem!

TR. (jumping up frightened). What do you want, sir?

TRAMP. Now don't get mad. I ain't hurtin' 'ye by comin' in, am I. Jisht come in fer a drink an' a squint at the purty teacher. Shay, you look like a purty gay little bird.

TR. (trembling). How dare you sir!

TRAMP. No 'ffense, Mish, I jist like to look at ye, thash all.

TR. Will you please leave this room at once!

TRAMP. My looks ain't pleasin' you. Ho, ho, ho.

TR. I said for you to get out of this room. Do you hear?

TRAMP. Gettin' mad, eh? I'll see about that. (Starts to go around the desk. Tr. rushes to the other side. The tramp crosses and gets between her and the door. Tr. picks up the ruler.) Sho that's your game is it? Eh? Well I'll fix you. (Lurches toward her.)

TR. Help! help! (drops the ruler and sinks into the chair covering her face with her hands.)

(Enter Larry, R.)

LARRY. Here you scoundrel, get out. (Grabs tramp, there is a struggle. Tr. screams, Larry pushes tramp to the door, another struggle he gets tramp out and locks door.)

TR. (rushing to Larry and clinging to him). Oh, Larry, I'm so frightened!

LARRY (patting her). It's all right. He can't come back.

TR. How did you happen to come?

LARRY. I passed him down the road, then I watched him. When I saw—

TR. (realizing that she is clinging to him, jumps away). Oh, Larry, what must you think?

LARRY. Do you want to know? (Roguishly.) I thought that I was in the tenth heaven.

TR. Larry Lawrence Sprague, I'm ashamed of you!

LARRY. I'm ashamed of myself. Please excuse me. Just the same I'm mighty glad I followed that tramp.

TR. And so am I. (Drops into the chair laughing.)

(Curtain.)

ACT II.

Scene. Mrs. Long's sitting-room. Doors right and left. The floor is covered with a bright-flowered carpet. A sofa, piled with colored pillows, up left. A center table, covered with cheap bric-a-brac, at right center. Two wooden chairs are at right and left of table. A wooden rocking chair is at right center. Up right is a whatnot holding shells and other bric-a-brac. The walls are hung with cheap, colored pictures and family portraits. The numerous decorations of the room are more showy than pleasing.

Mrs. Long, a worn out, farmer's wife, is dusting the table, Biddy, up right, is rolling her hands in her blue gingham kitchen apron.

MRS. LONG. As I told you, Biddy, I am expecting company this afternoon and we will have to give them something to eat.

BIDDY. Yes, mum.

MRS. LONG (*dusting the card receiver*). I don't for the life of me see why folks think they have to eat between meals just because they are visitin'. They wouldn't touch a mouthful if they were to home. I guess we're all pretty much pigs.

BIDDY. Yes, mum.

MRS. LONG (*looking at her sharply*). What's that you're sayin'?

BIDDY. I was sayin' that it made it friendly like.

MRS. LONG. Them biscuits I made this mornin' will be riz by four o'clock. You can put them in the oven, be sure you have a hot fire, and then make some good coffee. You can put a pitcher of cream on the table when you get it set. Set it in the dinin' room; and put on the chocolate cake and some strawberry perserves.

BIDDY. Anything else, mum?

MRS. LONG. Yes, slice up some cold meat; and you can save some lunch for the teacher. I s'pose she will be as hungry as a bear when she gets home from school, she always is.

BIDDY. Sure, an' I'll do that, mum. My, but she's the swate girl, just like an angel from heaven, she is, with her purty ways. Last night our room was freezin' cold, it was, and she just snuggled up to me like a little kitten, and she says, says she, "Biddy, you've saved my life this winter." She said that, the darlin'.

MRS. LONG. She'd better stop her complainin' about that room. It would be plenty warm enough if she would only keep the window shut.

BIDDY. Complainin', law me, I didn't say she was complainin'. Sure, she wouldn't do that if she had to slape in a snow drift.

MRS. LONG. Haven't you said about enough about that teacher? It's bad enough to have to have her around botherin', without havin' you singin' her praises from mornin' till night.

BIDDY. Ye never give her credit for the kind heart of her, mum. Listen now. I had woord from my sister in Canada that she was all burned out an' needed clothes. And what do ye think? She gave me the dress right off her back, she did, and twenty-five dollars in money. I hated to take it for the poor girl has little enough to live on, with her father and mother dead, an' all.

MRS. LONG. Biddy, did you ever hear of people being "too sweet to be wholesome?"

BIDDY. That's not the school teacher at all, at all. She was after tellin' me that when she got the new teacher's cottage, I am to come and live wid her. Sure, that will be heaven on earth!

MRS. LONG. You will be in your grave, and the teacher too, before the district will build her a cottage to live in. Now go into the kitchen and finish up your work. I hear them comin'.

BIDDY. More's the pitty, say I.

MRS. LONG. What did you say?

BIDDY. Sure, I was talkin' about the cottage for Miss Best, the darlin'.

(Exit Biddy, R.)

(Enter Mrs. Sharp, a thin, angular woman, and Mrs. Butler, who is rather stout, L.)

MRS. LONG. Come right in. I am glad that you could come.

MRS. BUTLER. Thank you. We're glad that you invited us.

MRS. LONG. Did anyone take care of your horse?

MRS. SHARP. No, I just tied him to a tree out there. I guess he'll be all right.

MRS. LONG *(going to door, R.)*. Biddy, Biddy, come here.

(Enter Biddy, R.)

BIDDY. Yes, mum.

MRS. LONG. Go out and put Mrs. Sharp's horse in the barn.

BIDDY. Yes, mum.

MRS. BUTLER *(taking off hat)*. How are you, Biddy?

BIDDY. Purty well, mum. How's yourself?

MRS. LONG *(sharply)*. Biddy!

BIDDY. Yes, mum. I'm going right away, mum.

(Exit Biddy, L.)

MRS. LONG. You once get Biddy started and you'll never get your horse put up. I guess I forgot to tell you to take off your things.

MRS. SHARP. We didn't wait to be asked.

MRS. LONG. You can lay them on the sofa; that is all it is good for. It's so hard no one can set on it. Have the rocking-chair, Mrs. Sharp. I am sorry I don't have two comfortable chairs. Long thinks if he has one to set in that is all that's necessary.

MRS. BUTLER (*sitting left of table*). I always prefer a straight chair. (*Taking crazy quilt block from bag.*) I brought my work along.

MRS. SHARP. What are you making?

MRS. BUTLER. I'm piecing a quilt out of the silk pieces I've saved ever since I was married. (*Showing it.*) That gray piece is my wedding dress.

MRS. LONG. You don't say.

MRS. BUTLER (*proudly*). This green square is a piece of my 'pearing out dress. My, how they all stared when we walked into church the Sunday after we was married. You could hear it rustle all over the meeting house. Feel how stiff it is.

MRS. SHARP. I s'pose you got more attention that day than the preacher.

MRS. LONG. You must have had money to buy two silk dresses.

MRS. BUTLER. My father was a wealthy man. I haven't always had to work like I have since I married Jed Butler and come here to live on a farm. I'll tell you one thing I won't let either of my girls marry farmers.

MRS. SHARP. Girls marry who they please these days.

MRS. BUTLER (*rising and going between ladies*). This white silk, with the for-get-me-nots sewed on it, was a piece of my mother's shroud (*sniffing*). I must have dropped my handkerchief in the buggy. I'll go out and get it.

(*Exit Mrs. Butler, L.*)

MRS. SHARP (*throwing it on table*). Did you ever in all your born days see anything as homely as that patchwork?

MRS. LONG. She just brought it along to show off how many silk dresses she had.

(*Enter Mrs. Butler.*)

MRS. BUTLER. How many bushels did you say, Susan?

MRS. SHARP (*confused*). Well,—well,—I don't remember just how many there was. It didn't take you long to find your handkerchief.

MRS. BUTLER. No, I dropped it right out here on the step.

MRS. SHARP. I didn't bring such beautiful work as you did. I just fetched the family darnin'. (*Begins darning socks.*) Have you heard about the new sewing machine for the school?

MRS. BUTLER. No, do tell.

MRS. SHARP. You know my man is on the board. It seems that the new teacher is trying to teach sewin' to them young ones.

MRS. BUTLER. I heard about it.

MRS. SHARP (*looking around cautiously*). She won't hear us, will she?

MRS. LONG. No. She ain't to home yet.

MRS. SHARP. She asked the board to buy a machine for the school.

MRS. LONG. What nonsense!

MRS. BUTLER. The idea!

MRS. SHARP. Long talked it over with me, and I soon told him what I thought about it.

MRS. BUTLER. So they wouldn't do it.

MRS. SHARP. Now she is having the children bring in old papers, and old rubbers, and all kinds of old junk to sell. She says if they don't get enough to buy a machine in that way, she is goin' to put on a play to raise money for it.

MRS. BUTLER. She seems to think she knows more about running the school than the school board.

MRS. SHARP. The folks ought to stay home from her show.

MRS. LONG. They won't. Most people are crazy to see their kids show off. I'm glad I'm not made that way.

(Enter Kate and Nina, L.)

KATE. Ma, I brought Nina home to play with me. I knew Mrs. Sharp was here and she could have a ride home.

MRS. LONG. Can't you speak to the ladies, Kate?

KATE. How do you do?

MRS. SHARP. What did you do in school today?

KATE. We learned a new Easter song.

MRS. BUTLER. Sing it for us.

KATE. I can't. I don't know it very well.

MRS. LONG *(snapping her finger)*. Stand up and sing it for the ladies, Kate, when they ask you to. Don't act silly, now.

KATE. Nina will have to sing it with me.

NINA. I don't know it.

KATE. You do to.

MRS. BUTLER. Both of you sing it.

MRS. LONG. Kate, I don't want to have to speak to you again.

(Kate and Nina sing Easter song.)

MRS. SHARP. That's a Sunday School song. What do they learn them that in school for?

MRS. LONG. They learn them a lot of things in school that might better be left out. It's just fooling away the children's time.

MRS. BUTLER. I think that song was real pretty.

MRS. LONG. What did you have for lunch today?

KATE. Teacher made some scalloped corn.

MRS. LONG. But you don't eat corn at home.

KATE. Mama, this was good corn.

(Ladies laugh.)

MRS. LONG. Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous as cooking a meal at noon for that mob of young ones? It just makes me mad. As if the mothers couldn't put up good enough lunches for their children.

MRS. SHARP. There's a lot of queer goings on in the school since that new teacher come.

(Enter Bidly R. her face is blackened, her apron burnt.)

BIDDY. Ah, Miss Long, come quick, the house is all on fire!

MRS. LONG *(jumping up)*. Where?

BIDDY. The kitchen is all ablaze *(dropping into chair)*. May the saints persevere us! *(Rocks back and forth crying.)* Oh, my! Oh, my!

(The ladies rush out R. Mrs. Butler, when she reaches the door, runs back to save her patchwork.)

(Exeunt Mrs. Long, Mrs. Sharp and Mrs. Butler, R.)

(Bidly continues crying.)

(Enter Teacher, L.)

TR. Why, Bidly, what is the matter?

BIDDY. It's glad I am to see you. We're in awful troubles.

TR. Is it your sister?

BIDDY *(between sobs)*. Ah, no, it's not her again.

TR. Tell me what you are crying about.

BIDDY. It's like this. The Missus sent me to put Mrs. Sharp's horse in the barn. When I came in my fire was most out, and her biscuits ready for the oven.

TR. Yes.

BIDDY. Then I took the ile can, which I shouldn't have touched, and poured some ile in the stove. The next thing I knew the fire jumped right out into my face to meet me. Ah, it's burnin' of the house I am.

TR. Bidly, don't take on so, the house isn't burning.

BIDDY. Ah, sure an' it is. The kitchen is all ablaze.

TR. Then we must put it out.

(Exit Teacher, R.)

(Bidly rocks back and forth crying lustily.)

(Enter ladies followed by Kate and Nina.)

MRS. LONG. Bidly, you've made an awful mess out there.

BIDDY. Is the fire out, mum?

MRS. LONG. There wasn't any, but there might have been. How many times have I got to tell you not to pour oil in the stove?

MRS. BUTLER. That was an awful careless thing to do.

MRS. SHARP. It's a wonder you didn't blow yourself up.

BIDDY *(rising)*. Sure an' I'll naver do it again even if me fire is as dead an' as black as MacManus' black dog.

MRS. LONG. Now you hurry and clean up that black soot. It's all over everything.

TR. I'll help you, Bidly.

(Exeunt Bidly and Teacher, R.)

MRS. BUTLER. Them hired girls is sometimes more trouble

than they are worth. My mother always kept one and sometimes two. I wasn't brought up to work in the kitchen.

KATE. Ma, can we have something to eat?

MRS. LONG. Yes, go out in the kitchen and ask Biddy to give you a piece of cake.

KATE. Cake, Oh, goody! Come on, Nina.

(Exeunt Kate and Nina, R.)

MRS. BUTLER. How did you come out in the trouble you had with Jensen over his dog killing your sheep?

MRS. LONG. We didn't come out at all.

MRS. BUTLER. I heard you were going to sue Jensen.

MRS. LONG. That's what we wanted to do, but we couldn't get Miss Best to appear as a witness. She knew more about it than anyone else. She saw the dead sheep, and she saw the dog.

MRS. SHARP. If you had her subpoenaed as a witness wouldn't she have to go?

MRS. LONG. But she wouldn't swear that it was Jensen's dog. Jake was awful mad about it.

(Enter Teacher, R.)

TR. Biddy would like to know what table cloth to use.

MRS. LONG *(disgustedly)*. As if she didn't know what cloths I have. I'll go out and see about it.

(Exit Mrs. Long, R.)

MRS. BUTLER. We were just talking about Jensen's dog killing Long's sheep. Mrs. Long says you saw him do it. Why wouldn't you appear in court?

TR. Because I didn't see him do it. When I went to school one morning I saw some dead sheep in the pasture, and a yellow dog running across the field.

MRS. SHARP. Well, Jensen's dog is yaller, ain't he?

TR. Yes, but there are lots of yellow dogs around. I couldn't swear that the dog I saw was Mr. Jensen's. It might have belonged to some other farmer.

MRS. BUTLER. I guess you were wise to keep out of the neighborhood row. There has been trouble between Long and Jensen ever since the dispute over the boundary line.

(Exit Teacher, R.)

MRS. SHARP *(looking after her)*. You can see, plain as day, why she held off. She certainly knows Jensen's dog when she sees him.

MRS. BUTLER. I heard that Long wouldn't speak to her for weeks after it happened. He has an awfully sulky disposition.

(Enter Mrs. Long, R.)

MRS. SHARP. Don't the teacher set with you when she is to home?

MRS. LONG. No, she stays in the kitchen for the most part. She claims she can't stand tobacco smoke, and Jake, of course, has to have his pipe. We are just as well pleased. I never did want to board the teacher, but no one else would have her.

(Nina and Kate appear in door eating cake.)

MRS. SHARP. She ain't just the kind of a teacher we want any way. I guess she'll soon get her walking papers.

MRS. BUTLER. She's got no folks. What will become of her?

MRS. LONG. From the number of letters she gets, I guess there is someone wants her worse than we do?

MRS. BUTLER. Has she got a beau?

MRS. LONG. I can't say as to that. I read one of the postal cards she got the other day. There was somethin' writ on it in a foreign language. I couldn't read it, but I s'pose it was some love message.

MRS. SHARP. She's so close mouthed, I s'pose she wouldn't tell you even if she had a beau.

(Enter Biddy, R.)

BIDDY. Your supper is ready, mum.

MRS. BUTLER *(rising eagerly)*. Now that's a shame to get a meal for us. We could have gone home as well as not.

MRS. LONG. You won't get a meal, just a little bite.

(Exeunt Biddy, Mrs. Long, Mrs. Butler, and Mrs. Sharp, R.)

NINA *(coming to center)*. Did you hear what that mean, old Mrs. Sharp said about our teacher?

KATE. I hate her; I do. I wish I could kill her.

NINA. I wish we could play some trick on her to get even.

KATE. Let's. What can we do?

NINA. We might take a wheel off her buggy and hide it like they did to Joe Schmitt when he got married; or we might poison her horse.

KATE. We can't. We don't know how.

NINA. What can we do?

(Enter Teacher, R.)

TR. Don't you want to come out in the kitchen and have something to eat?

KATE. We just had something. Miss Best, did you ever play a trick on anyone?

TR. *(thinking)*. When I was at boarding school we played a trick on some of the girls. *(Laughing.)* It was awfully funny.

NINA. What did you do?

TR. We sewed up the sleeves of their night gowns. They couldn't get them on. You ought to do it some time. *(Laughing.)* It's lots of fun.

(Enter Biddy, R.)

BIDDY. The ladies want you to set down with 'em, Miss Best.

TR. All right Biddy. Thank you for telling me. (*Laughing.*) It's too funny for words to see them trying to get their arms in.

(*Exit Biddy and Teacher.*)

KATE. Let's sew up her coat sleeves (*going to table.*) Here is a needle.

NINA. Here is another. Which is her coat?

KATE. I don't know. Suppose we sew up both of them. I guess they both said mean things about Miss Best.

NINA (*sewing*). Won't it be fun to see the mean old hens trying to get their coats on?

KATE (*sewing*). It just serves them right.

NINA. You bet it does. Won't they be awful mad though. (*Breaking her thread.*) Mine's done.

KATE. So is mine. We'll have to put them back where we found them. (*Putting down coat.*)

NINA. I guess I'd better go home now.

KATE. Aren't you going to wait and ride with Mrs. Sharp?

NINA. No, I guess I'd better go while the going is good.

KATE. I'll go a piece with you.

(*Enter Teacher, R.*)

TR. Kate, your mother wants you.

NINA. Got to go. Good-bye.

(*Exit Nina, L.*)

(*Enter Mrs. Long, Mrs. Sharp, and Mrs. Butler picking teeth.*)

MRS. SHARP. I'm sorry to have to "eat and run" as the sayin' is, but you know how it is with farmers' wives; there are so many chores to do.

MRS. BUTLER (*putting on coat*). We have had a beautiful time. You must come over and see me real soon.

MRS. LONG. I'll bring the recipe for that chocolate cake if I can find it.

MRS. SHARP (*who has been struggling with her coat*). I can't seem to find the hole in this sleeve.

MRS. LONG. Maybe you got your arm inside the lining. Mine sometimes does that.

MRS. BUTLER. I can't seem to get into my coat either. (*Struggles.*)

(*Enter Teacher and Kate.*)

MRS. SHARP (*examining sleeve*). No wonder I couldn't get in. My sleeves are sewed up.

MRS. BUTLER (*who has ripped sleeve out of coat*). So are mine.

MRS. LONG. Who do you s'pose ever did that?

MRS. SHARP. Them kids, likely. I heard them giggling about something.

MRS. LONG (*taking hold of Kate*). Did you sew up Mrs. Sharp's coat? (*Shaking her.*) Answer me, did you?

KATE. Yes, ma, I did. I didn't think—

MRS. LONG. Well, you go up stairs, and take off your clothes, and go to bed. When I get time I'll tend to you, young lady. I'll make you think.

TR. Please don't punish her. I'm afraid that I'm the guilty one. I told the girls about sewing up some night gowns when I was in boarding school. That gave them the idea.

MRS. SHARP. So you are up to fool tricks, too.

MRS. BUTLER. Who ever would have thought it?

TR. I'm very sorry about your sleeve, Mrs. Butler. Let me fix it for you. Here is a needle.

MRS. BUTLER. No, I see Biddy has the horse ready. We will go home. Good-bye, Mrs. Long.

MRS. SHARP. Good-bye. Come and see me. (*Both ignore Miss Best.*)

(*Exeunt Mrs. Sharp and Mrs. Butler, L.*)

KATE. The mean old things.

MRS. LONG. Kate, shut up, they'll hear you.

KATE. It wasn't teacher's fault a bit. Nina and I did it all ourselves.

MRS. LONG. Well, don't you ever do such a thing again or I'll whip you good. Now go and wash those dirty dishes.

TR. I'll help you, Kate.

(*Exeunt Kate and Teacher, R.*)

(*Knock L. Mrs. Long goes to door.*)

MRS. LONG. Come right in Larry.

(*Enter Larry, R.*)

LARRY. Good afternoon, Mrs. Long.

MRS. LONG. Have a chair. (*Pause.*) Did you want to see Mr. Long about something?

LARRY. No, ma'am. (*Pause.*)

MRS. LONG. Did your mother send you on an errand?

LARRY. No, ma'am. (*Pause.*)

MRS. LONG (*anxiously*). It's pretty good weather for December.

LARRY. Yes, ma'am. (*Pause, Mrs. Long dusts chair with handkerchief, nervously.*)

MRS. LONG. Is there anything I can do for you?

LARRY. Is the teacher around?

MRS. LONG. Oh, that's what you want. We'll I'm glad to know. I'll get her.

(*Exit Mrs. Long, L.*)

(*Larry fixes tie and hair, brushes off shoes with handkerchief.*)

(Enter Teacher, L.)

TR. How do you do, Larry. This is indeed a surprise. (Shaking hands.) Have this chair.

LARRY. I thought you would be surprised, but I couldn't wait till tomorrow to see if the marks had come.

TR. Yes, Larry, they came on this mail.

LARRY (anxiously). How did I come out?

TR. I am glad to say that you passed in everything.

LARRY (rising). Oh, goody!

TR. I have the slips right here (taking them out of her waist.)

LARRY (laughing). Next your heart?

TR. (rising). Just look at your mark in arithmetic.

LARRY. Gee! That's great! (Looking at slips.) I even passed in grammar. I was the most afraid of that one.

TR. You got a fairly good mark, too. 78 isn't so bad.

LARRY. I owe it all to you, Miss Best, every bit of it.

TR. (laughing). I was under the impression that you did some of the work, but perhaps I am mistaken. Now you can enter the School of Agriculture.

LARRY. Sure, I'll send in my grades right away.

TR. (sitting). Larry, I'm glad that you have decided to be a farmer. We need good farmers, men who understand their work; farmers who can be leaders in their communities.

LARRY (sitting). That's the kind I'm going to be, you bet. And to think if you hadn't come here to teach I would have been batting around the city next year, looking for a job.

TR. I'm glad that you feel satisfied. Sometimes I get pretty discouraged. The people don't all like my teaching as well as you do.

LARRY. Now, don't you worry about that. Your teaching is the right kind. I know because I have had it. Don't you ever let these old knockers, who don't know what they are talking about, influence you. You have shown how farm life can be made way ahead of city life.

TR. I'm glad that you feel that way, Larry. That is what a rural teacher should do.

LARRY. I must go now (rising), but I want you to know that you have been a help and an (hesitating) inspiration to me.

TR. (rising and shaking hands): And you have been a help and an inspiration to me, too. It works both ways.

LARRY. I'm mighty glad I passed. Good-bye, teacher.

TR. I am just as glad as you are; but I shall miss my big boy next term. Good-bye.

LARRY. You'll have to get another janitor, see. (Both laugh.)

(Exit Larry, L.)

TR. (stands at door for a minute watching him go.) Come in Mr. Sharp. How do you do, Mr. Peterson?

MR. SHARP. Thanks, we will.

TR. Did you wish to see Mr. Long? Have some chairs and I'll call him.

MR. SHARP. No, our business is with you. We have just had a board meeting at my house, and we come 'round to talk things over with you. Ryan had to go home, but he thinks as we do. *(They sit.)*

TR. I have been waiting to see some member of the board to ask if we couldn't use some of our funds to buy a typewriter. We could get a rebuilt Underwood or Remington cheap.

MR. PETERSON. Vat you want him for, ha?

TR. To teach the children typewriting. It is just as important for a farmer to know how to write a good business letter as any other business man. *(Laughing.)* You know that most of them, in this community, depend on their wives to write their letters.

MR. SHARP. More foolishness, Peterson. That's just what we come to see you about. We ain't pleased with the way you are runnin' this school.

TR. How do you know what I am doing? You have never visited the school.

MR. SHARP. Well, I've heard enough to know.

TR. What have you heard? Aren't the children pleased with their work?

MR. PETERSON. Ya, dey like it all right.

MR. SHARP. They like it too well; that's the trouble. It's just fool play, not work. When we send our children to school we want them to study.

TR. I'm trying to have them study the things that will help them on the farm. That is why I organized the boys' and girls' club work.

MR. SHARP. Well, that ain't what we hired you for. We can learn them to farm to home. But we didn't come here to hash words with you. We want a plain answer to a plain question, yes or no. Are or are you not going to cut out all this folderol stuff and get down to brass tacks? We want our children learned the same way that we was learned. If you can't do it, then we are going to get another teacher.

TR. *(rises and walks thoughtfully across room, then returns to center)*. You want a plain answer? Then my answer is this, gentlemen. As long as I stay here I am going to teach the things that will make the life on the farm more interesting to your children. If you don't like my methods, you can get another teacher.

MR. SHARP *(rising)*. Well, Peterson, our business is done, we might as well go.

MR. PETERSON *(coming to center)*. Good-dagen. Ay tank you make von big mistake. My son Yohn, he tink you yust fine, But ay vont him to learn yust like Master Sharp say, ya.

TR. Good-bye Mr. Peterson. I'm sorry I can't please you, but I must do my work in the way that seems best to me.

(Exeunt Sharp and Peterson, L.)

TR. *(laughing and dropping into chair)*. Helen Maud Best, you're fired.

(Enter Kate, R.)

KATE. What did you say, Miss Best? And what are you laughing at?

TR. We are both in disgrace now, Katie. These men are sending me away.

KATE. Where are you going, to Auntie Williams?

TR. No, I can't go there. *(Pause.)* Where shall I go! *(Drops face in hands.)*

KATE. We want you. *(Kneeling by the chair.)* Stay with us, Miss Best. *(She presses face against teacher's and then steals into her arms.)* Don't cry, teacher, please don't cry.

Curtain.

ACT III.

Scene. Living room in the new teacherage. Doors right and left, a window left center. On the right is a fire-place, in left center a library table with some books and magazines. Comfortable chairs are scattered about. There are a few good pictures on the wall. The room is decorated with flowers. The furnishings are simple but artistic.

Nina and Kate are standing near stage center. Nina is powdering her nose, Kate is putting on a face veil.

KATE. Dear, I hope the train won't be late.

NINA. Wouldn't that be a calamity. The program is so long I'm afraid there won't be much time left to dance. How do you think she will look?

KATE. Sweet as a peach, if we may judge from the picture. Isn't it grand that she is coming here to teach?

NINA. Do you know you have said that about a dozen times already?

KATE. And you have said it more times than I have. Has Lawrence asked you for the first dance?

NINA. No, I thought he had asked you.

KATE *(impatently)*. I wonder why he doesn't come, it's getting late.

NINA. I hope we don't miss the train. Do you remember when we called Lawrence "Larry"? Think of calling the biggest man in the community "Larry".

KATE. I sometimes feel that I ought to call him Mr. Sprague, he seems such an important individual, even Lawrence is too familiar.

NINA. Isn't it wonderful how he has worked for our school since he came from St. Paul?

KATE. What excitement there was when they voted for the bonds for this consolidated school.

NINA. The most fun was when Lawrence ran for the school board. Don't you remember how the women all turned out and voted for him?

KATE. We had all had enough of old Sharp and his crowd running the school. It was getting worse and worse every year. You know ma took me out.

NINA. Oh, Kate, do you remember that dreadful sister of Mr. Sharp's that came to teach us the year after Miss Best left, the woman with the awful red hair and freckles? I was scared to death of her.

KATE. Mr. Sharp bragged to pa that she had the best order in the county.

NINA. And that awful man who whipped Gerald Mattson to make him stop lisping.

KATE. Don't mention him! It just makes the shivers go up and down my spine to think of those terrible days. That was when mother took me out of school.

NINA. I stopped too. If things had gone on much longer there wouldn't have been any pupils left to teach.

(Enter Gerald, R.)

GERALD. Hello, girlths!

KATE. Are you going to the train with us, Gerald?

GERALD. Yeth, if there ith room. There ith an awful big bunch waiting outside to go in the carths.

NINA. They are all waiting for Lawrence. Kate and I are going in his car. I think there will be room for you too.

KATE. He is going to bring the teacher back in his car.

NINA *(going to the window)*. Why don't he come! Gerald, won't you 'phone to the depot and see if the train is on time? The telephone is in the new office.

GERALD. I know where it ith *(going to door)*. Here comths Lawrenth now.

(Exit Gerald, R.)

KATE. Does my hat look all right?

NINA. Lawrence won't look at you tonight, he is too excited about the new school teacher.

(Enter Lawrence, R.)

LAWRENCE. Well, girls, are you ready?

KATE. Yes, we have been ready an hour.

NINA. More or less.

LAWRENCE. We'll have to hurry, the others have started. Sorry I'm so late. I had to go around by Riverside and get the

ice cream. (*Helping Kate on with her coat.*) How nice you girls look.

KATE. It's because we are on the reception committee to meet the new principal of our consolidated school.

(*Enter Mrs. Long, R.*)

MRS. LONG. How do you do, Lawrence? Did you get the ice cream?

LAWRENCE. Yes, I left it out in the kitchen. Be sure and keep the door locked. How is the supper coming?

MRS. LONG. Everything is lovely. We will be all ready to set down as soon as the program is over. We have chicken pie and—

KATE (*interrupting*). Ma, we must go. We are late now.

MRS. LONG. Go on then. I'm not stopping you.

(*Exeunt Kate, Nina and Lawrence, L.*)

(*Enter Mrs. Sharp, R.*)

MRS. SHARP. I've just been through the school building and the cottage. My, ain't they fine!

MRS. LONG. Yes, indeed. The cottage has everything anyone can ask for.

MRS. SHARP. I s'pose that you are mighty glad that they have at last got a place for the teachers to live in so you won't have to board them.

GERALD (*outside*). Kate, thay, Kate, (*Enter Gerald, L.*), Where are the girlths?

MRS. LONG. They have gone.

GERALD. Without me?

MRS. LONG. I don't think they have started yet. Perhaps you can catch them. (*Gerald begins looking around.*) What are you looking for?

MRS. LONG. I can find it. (*Looks everywhere.*) (*Auto horn.*)

MRS. LONG. What is it? I'll help you.

GERALD. It'h my cap.

MRS. SHARP. Are you crazy? The cap is on your head.

GERALD. Tho it ith. Thanks. (*Runs out.*)

(*Exit Gerald, R.*)

MRS. SHARP. They are all so excited over the teacher's coming that they don't know which end they are standing on.

(*Enter Mrs. Williams, R.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS. How do you do Mrs. Sharp? (*Shaking hands.*) And Mrs. Long? I'm mighty glad to see both of you.

MRS. LONG. I'm glad that you could come to the opening of our school house.

MRS. SHARP. This is one time our district got ahead of youn.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Where shall I put these hot rolls I brought for the supper?

MRS. SHARP. I'm glad that you have brought some of your famous Parker House rolls. I'll take them out in the kitchen.

(Exit Mrs. Sharp, L.)

MRS. LONG. Have you been through the new building?

MRS. WILLIAMS. Yes, and isn't it beautiful. I should think you would be very proud of it.

MRS. LONG *(beaming)*. We are.

MRS. WILLIAMS. And to think that Hetty's little girl is to come back and live in this lovely cottage.

MRS. LONG. We are tickled to death to get her back, especially the young people who went to school to her.

MRS. WILLIAMS. They didn't want her to leave where she was teaching. They raised her salary 50 dollars.

MRS. LONG. We heard about it.

MRS. WILLIAMS. She wrote me that she wanted to come back to the place where she started teaching. She said that she would never be happy until she had made good here.

MRS. LONG. She was all right when she was here before. The trouble was the school board didn't know anything about modern methods of teaching. When the state inspector came around, she told them a few things.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Of course, Helen was young and made mistakes like all young folks do. But she has the best heart in the world, just like her mother.

(Enter Gerald, R.)

MRS. LONG. Didn't you go to the depot?

GERALD. No, they went off and left me.

MRS. WILLIAMS. That's too bad.

GERALD. I'm glad for I found out thompin' important.

MRS. LONG. What?

GERALD. I sthartered to the depot—

MRS. LONG. Did you think that you would catch up with the auto?

GERALD. No, I thought I would meet them coming back. Then I thaw a whole bunch of fellerths, and they were putting on masks.

MRS. LONG. Mercy on us! What do you suppose they are up to?

GERALD. I don't know. I run back just as fast as I could to tell you.

MRS. WILLIAMS. You don't suppose they are going to kidnap Helen and carry her away, do you?

MRS. LONG. I guess Lawrence Sprague wouldn't let them do that after he has worked so hard to get her here. I'll go out and tell the men folks to watch out. They are in the school building.

MRS. WILLIAMS. It is probably that rough-neck crowd from the Creek. They are always hanging round at parties trying to steal the ice cream.

MRS. WILLIAMS. I'll take care of that, too.

(Exit Mrs. Long, L.)

GERALD. Mrs. Williams, did you come all the way over from your house to the opening exerthises of our new school?

MRS. WILLIAMS. To tell you the honest truth, son, Sam and I came all the way just to see the new teacher.

GERALD. Tho did I.

MRS. WILLIAMS. I thought as much.

GERALD. She was the bethst teacher we ever had.

(Enter Biddy, R.)

BIDDY. How do you find yourself, Mrs. Williams *(shaking hands)*. And isn't it a great day for us all?

MRS. WILLIAMS. Yes, indeed! They tell me Biddy that you are going to keep house for the teachers.

BIDDY. Sure, I'll do that. It was the swate darlin' herself who always was sayin' that when we got a tacher's cottage I was to live with her.

MRS. WILLIAMS. She used to tell me how good you were to her.

BIDDY. So she wrote to Mr. Lawrence, she did, and she asked him to make me housekeeper. *(Proudly.)* And I'm to be chaperon—e too.

MRS. WILLIAMS. What for?

BIDDY. He said it was to kape the folks from talkin', but I guess they would have to sew up their mouths to do that.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Oh, yes, I see; the agricultural instructor is going to live here too.

BIDDY. That's it. I don't see why we need wan when its instructin' the farmers Mr. Lawrence is all the time wid his farmer's clubs.

MRS. WILLIAMS. I guess I'll see if I can help in the kitchen.

(Exit Mrs. Williams, R.)

GERALD. Biddy, doth this necktie look all right?

BIDDY. Sure, an' it it's fine enough for St. Patrick himself.

GERALD. Doth my hair look all right?

BIDDY. It might be better if you didn't split it in the middle, but I s'pose that is the style.

GERALD. Do you think these thocks are all right? *(putting foot on table.)*

BIDDY. Well, you will have to ask someone that knows about that. Sure, an' I niver wore any. One would think from the style of ye that ye had your cap set for the teacher herself.

GERALD. I want to look all right.

BIDDY. Maybe it's that little Katie you have got your eye on, eh?

GERALD. Oh, no, Biddy. She isn't pretty enough.

BIDDY. Or Nina wid her snappin' black eyes.

GERALD. Shuck! Biddy, I wouldn't look at her.

BIDDY. Well, whoever it is, may the saints preserve them when they see that git up.

(*Auto horn.*)

GERALD. Here they are now; I muthst go.

(*Exit Gerald, R.*)

BIDDY. Ah, the consate of these kids!

(*Enter Mrs. Sharp, R.*)

MRS. SHARP. They've come, Biddy, and the exercises in the auditorium are going to begin right away.

BIDDY. I'll be along directly. I want to give the new furniture another rub.

MRS. SHARP. It doesn't have a speck of dust on it now. You'd better come.

(*Exit Mrs. Sharp, L.*)

(*Biddy begins dusting the room.*)

(*Enter Miss Best, L., followed by Kate, Nina, Lawrence, Mrs. Butler and Mrs. Long.*)

TR. Biddy, I couldn't go to the exercises until I had seen you. (*Embracing her.*) You were the kindest friend a silly, little school teacher ever had.

BIDDY (*wiping her eyes*). Ah, go on now! (*Taking her face in her hands*). Sure, an you are the same swate girl that you was when you left us, you ain't changed wan bit.

TR. I have, Biddy. I may not look it but I hope that I know a lot more than I did when I was here before (*looking around*). I suppose this is our living room. It couldn't be more home-like and comfortable.

KATE. It was Lawrence's plan.

LAWRENCE. You and Nina helped me select the things.

MRS. BUTLER. They are in excellent taste. We used to have a table something like that one when I was a girl at home. You know my father was a wealthy man. I was well brought up.

(*Enter Mr. Peterson, R.*)

TR. (*shaking hands*). How do you do Mr. Peterson?

MR. PETERSON. Pretty gude. How's yourself?

TR. I'm very well, thank you.

MR. PETERSON. Have you seen my boy, Yohn?

TR. No, but I want to see him.

MR. PETERSON. He ban here. I don't tank you know ham. He ban one big Swede now.

TR. That is good. What is he doing, farming?

MR. PETERSON. No, he vork for de goverment tasting milk, yust like you had ham do to school. I tell you he vant to see you right away quick.

TR. I want to see him too, Mr. Peterson.

MR. PETERSON. Ay can't speak Anglish gude, but ve all pretty glad to see you back hare. My boy, Yohn, he gat seventy-fam dollar a month vorking for de goverment.

TR. I'm very glad to hear that he is doing so well.

(Enter Mrs. Sharp, L.)

MRS. SHARP. I guess we had better move on to the auditorium; they are ready to begin. Has any one seen my man? I can't find him.

(Great commotion begins outside, beating pans, ringing cow-bells, tooting horns. Those on stage are excited.)

MRS. WILLIAMS. It's a charivari. Has anyone been married?

(Enter Gerald, excited, R.)

GERALD. The masked men I thaw are all around the school houth.

LAWRENCE. I hope they don't mean any mischief. I must see.

KATE. Oh! don't go out, Lawrence. They may hurt you.

NINA *(holding him)*. Please don't go.

LAWRENCE. I must.

(Exit Lawrence, R.)

(Noise stops.)

BIDDY. Why don't you go help him?

GERALD. I guess I'd better not. I might spoil my new clothes.

KATE *(looking out of window)*. There is a big crowd around the school house.

MRS. BUTLER. What are they doing?

KATE. I think they want to drown out the meeting.

TR. *(laughing)*. What a joke! The exercises haven't begun yet.

BIDDY. Maybe its serenading you they are, Miss Best.

KATE. Just look! they are running like mad down the hill.

NINA *(at window)*. Lawrence and the other boys are after them.

KATE. One of them has tumbled down. Larry is picking him up.

MRS. WILLIAMS. Is he hurt?

KATE. It's too dark to see. He is trying to get away. Now the boys are helping him.

MRS. SHARP *(jumping on chair near window)*. What boys? I can't see.

NINA. They are our own boys. They've captured him and are bringing him in.

TR. This is exciting.

BIDDY. Sure, an' the German war has nothing on the likes of us.

KATE. Oh, oh, oh! He's going to get away. (*Opening window.*) Hang on to him, Lawrence. Girls, let's help.

(*Exeunt Kate and Nina, L.*)

MRS. WILLIAMS. I wonder where Sam is.

TR. (*going to her*). Don't worry, Auntie, he's all right.

MRS. WILLIAMS. But it might be one of those awful I. W. W.'s and he might be armed.

MRS. BUTLER. Do you think the rest of the gang will attack us? I wish they would let him go.

(*Struggle is heard outside.*)

(*Enter Lawrence, L., with others dragging a masked man.*)

MR. SHARP. Let me go, I say.

LAWRENCE. We will as soon as we find out who you are, and what you and your gang are trying to do. (*Tries to take off mask.*)

MR. SHARP. Let me alone. I'm all right.

(*Lawrence pulls off mask showing the face of Mr. Sharp. Pause.*)

MR. SHARP (*doggedly*). I hope you're satisfied now.

MRS. LONG. Well, of all things!

BIDDY. That we should ever live to see such a sight.

MR. SHARP. I didn't mean any harm. I just got out with the boys to have a little sport.

BIDDY. It's sport you call it? Wall, it's a quare kind of sport I'm afther thinkin', frightenin' us out of a year's growth.

(*Tr. goes to Biddy and takes her down, L.*)

MRS. SHARP (*coming to center*). Biddy is right, and it's a queer kind of sport for an old man, and a respectable member of the community to be indulgin' in. I'm so disgraced that I'm speechless. What must our neighbors think of us? You getting out with a black rag over your face, and ringing a cow bell and beating on my old dish pan until we can't hear our own ears. Is it stark crazy you are? Such goings on! I've a mind to leave you, I have, and these people would bear me out. Oh, I'm so ashamed I can't think.

TR. (*going to her*). Mrs. Sharp you are making a mountain out of a little mole hill. No doubt Mr. Sharp was celebrating the opening of the new consolidated school. I remember he always took a great interest in the school. I'd like to think they were giving me a serenade. Let's call it that. Lawrence, can't you bring them all back and give them some ice cream?

LAWRENCE. At the rate they started they are at Koon Creek by this time. I suppose that it was that rough-neck bunch.

MR. SHARP. Teacher, you're on the square, and that is more than I have been with you. It was that roudy bunch from Koon Creek. They wanted to hook some of the supper. Then I encouraged them to give you a hot reception, too. You have taken it like a lady. I didn't deserve it. Marty isn't the only one that is ashamed of old Peter Sharp. I'm ashamed of myself.

TR. Don't say that. This is a momentous event in all of our lives, and we aren't going to have any one saying disagreeable things about themselves or anyone else. Come in to the auditorium, every one of you, for the fun is going to begin. Lead the way, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE. Listen to her bossing us around like she used to do when we were her kids.

(Exeunt Lawrence, Kate, Nina, Mrs. Butler, Mr. and Mrs. Sharp, Mrs. Long and Gerald, L.)

BIDDY. Isn't she the wonder now! Just to see how she won the heart of that old rascal. Did you ever see the bate of it?

MRS. WILLIAMS. She is for all the world like her mother. Hetty was a beautiful girl. Everybody loved her. They just couldn't help it.

(Enter Tr., L.)

TR. Come Aunty, and Biddy, too. You will miss the entertainment. I'll be there in a minute. I left my hand bag somewhere and I must powder my nose and make myself presentable.

BIDDY. Can't I help you now?

TR. No, I want you to get front seats so you can hear my speech. It is the effort of my life.

(Exeunt Mrs. Williams and Betty, L.)

(She drops down in a chair and assumes a thoughtful attitude.)

(Enter Lawrence, L.)

LAWRENCE *(looking at her for a minute)*. A penny for your thoughts.

TR. *(laughing)*. They aren't worth even a halfpenny. I was thinking how really wonderful it is to be here again, and to find my old pupils grown up and doing things worth while for the community. Then this teacher's cottage! Do you remember how I used to dream about it? I will never again say that dreams don't come true, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE. I suppose you have forgotten the motto you gave us once. I am going to make it the central thought of my address tonight. "As the twig is bent, the tree inclines." You surely tried to start us right. But call me Larry, please, just as you used to do.

TR. I thought you didn't like the name, and whipped every boy who called you that when you came home from school.

LAWRENCE. Nevertheless, I want you to call me that.

TR. Very well, anything to accommodate you, for you have done so much for me.

LAWRENCE. You haven't had much time to look around, but if you want to make any changes—

TR. I won't. It is very complete. Tell me, who planned the laboratory. Did you?

LAWRENCE. No, I bribed a teacher of domestic science up at school to draw the plans.

TR. I only took a peep at it, but I saw enough to know that we are going to enjoy our cooking lessons immensely.

LAWRENCE. I only ask that you don't get too fond of your job, like some teachers I know.

TR. Why?

LAWRENCE (*hesitating*). Because I'm going to ask you to resign at the end of the year.

TR. (*jumping up in alarm*). What do you mean?

LAWRENCE. I didn't plan to tell you yet, but I hope to have a better position for you then.

TR. (*going to him*). Tell me about it

LAWRENCE. Do you remember that day when the tramp came into the school-house and frightened you so?

TR. When he scared the wits out of me, yes.

LAWRENCE. And I protected you.

TR. You were the hero that day.

LAWRENCE. Well, when I had you in my arms—

TR. I did do the clinging vine act, didn't I? I am ashamed of you for reminding me of it.

LAWRENCE. That day marked the beginning of a new life for me. I guess I passed from the kid stage into manhood. Anyway a great resolve took possession of me.

TR. And this beautiful school is the result?

LAWRENCE. Don't you understand? I was sure that you would guess it from my letters.

TR. (*laughing*). Perhaps I'm dense.

(*Overture heard at distance.*)

LAWRENCE. It was that some day I would have the right to hold you in my arms, may I?

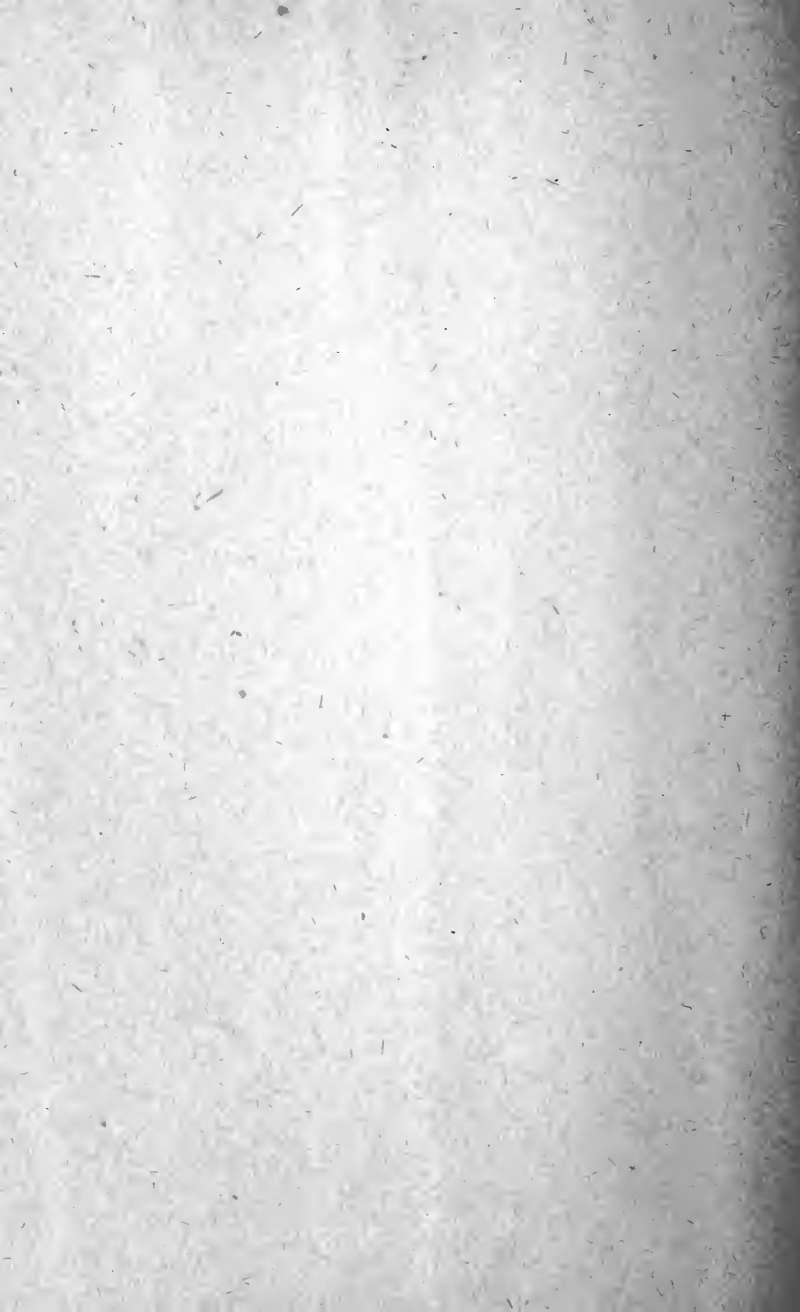
VOICE (*outside*). Miss Best, Lawrence, where are you? It's time to begin.

LAWRENCE. Is it asking too much? Tell me.

TR. Larry. It would be setting a very bad example to other teachers; but I'll think about it. (*He puts his arm around her and they go off laughing.*)

(*Exeunt Miss Best and Lawrence, L.*)

(*Curtain.*)



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